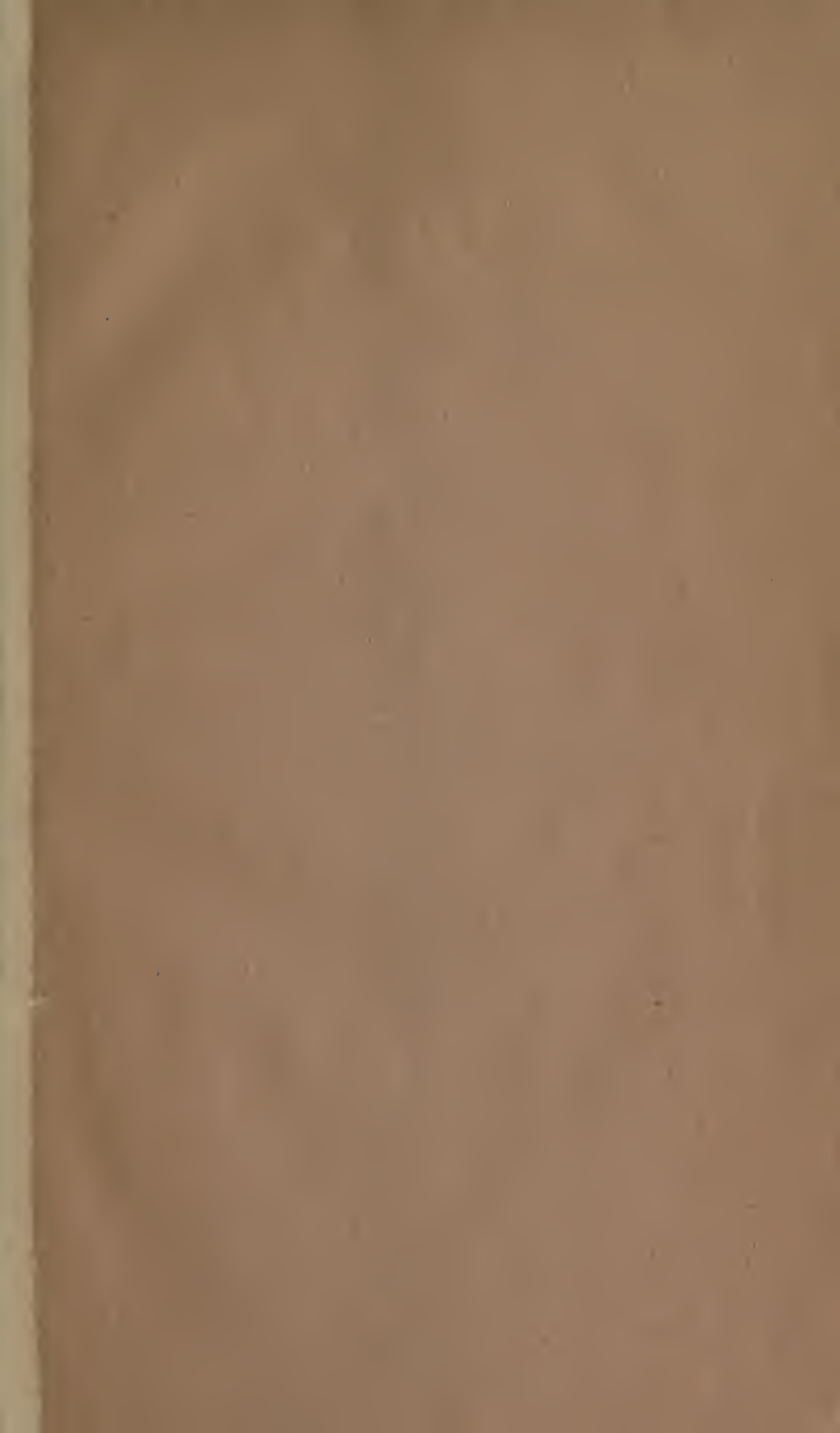


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A
L E T T E R
TO
SAMUEL WHITBREAD, ESQ. M. P.
ON HIS
PROPOSED BILL
FOR
THE A M E N D M E N T
OF THE
POOR LAWS.

BY THE
REV. T. R. MALTHUS, A. M.

LATE FELLOW OF JESUS COLLEGE,

CAMBRIDGE;

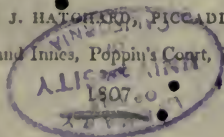
AND AUTHOR OF THE ESSAY ON THE PRINCIPLE OF POPULATION.

L O N D O N :

PRINTED FOR J. JOHNSON, ST. PAUL'S CHURCHYARD,

AND J. HATCHARD, PICCADILLY,

By Wood and Innes, Poppin's Court, Fleet-Street.



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A

E T T E R

TO

SAMUEL WHITHEAD, ESQ. M.B.

OF THE

PROBATE COURT

IN

THE STATE OF NEW YORK

OF THE

PROBATE COURT

IN

IN THE MATTER OF

THE ESTATE OF

DECEASED

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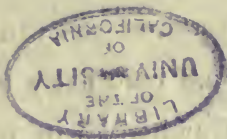
IN THE

PROBATE COURT OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK

IN THE MATTER OF

THE ESTATE OF

DECEASED



A

LETTER,

&c. &c.

SIR;

As you have done me the honour to refer more than once to my work on Population, and to express your conviction of the truth of its fundamental principles, I trust you will pardon the liberty I take in offering to you a few remarks, which an attentive perusal of your bill on the Poor Laws has suggested. The acknowledged candour and uprightness of your character and the distinguished talents which you have on all occasions shown, whenever the service of your Country has called them into action, are pledges to me, that you are anxious to collect informa-

B

tion from every quarter where it can be attained; and though you are little likely to be unduly biassed either by authorities or numbers, yet that you stand on too high ground to be afraid of retracting or modifying any proposition which you may afterwards see reason to think would not be attended with the effects which it appeared at first to promise.

[The experience of the last two hundred years, and the circumstances which have called for the present bill, are convincing proofs, that in the establishment of a satisfactory provision for the poor, the efforts of the ablest legislators have been repeatedly foiled. That the cause of these reiterated failures is to be found in those principles which I have endeavoured to explain in the Work to which you have referred, is a truth of which I feel the fullest confidence; but I am very far indeed from the presumption of supposing that the plan which I there suggested,

or any other that I could offer, would approach towards an adequate remedy for the evils which it has been the constant object of the legislature to remove. Indeed, from the developement of those principles it would appear that such a remedy is not to be expected!

It was denounced from divine authority to the inhabitants of the land of Canaan "that the poor should never cease from among them¹;" and the history of every country with which we are acquainted abundantly proves that the denunciation never has been, or will be, confined to a single nation. It was in fact a declaration of one of those difficulties with which it is the lot of humanity constantly to contend, and which as they can never be completely overcome without perfect virtue, seem to be destined to furnish un-

¹ Deut. xv., 2.

ceasing motives to the exercise and improvement both of our intellectual energies and our moral feelings.

But though to banish poverty from society be a task which, if not absolutely impossible, is clearly beyond the power of legislative regulations; yet the slightest glance at the state of different countries will indicate such important variations in the pressure of this evil, as to give us the best grounded hopes of being able to lighten a burden which we cannot remove. In this noble and animating task however we must expect to meet with difficulties of no inconsiderable magnitude on every side to which we turn our view. And this consideration makes it pre-eminently the duty of the legislature, while it violates no positive precepts of morality, to be guided in its decisions by general rather than particular consequences.

{The compulsory provision for the poor in this country has, you will allow, produced effects which follow almost necessarily from the principle of population. The mere pecuniary consideration of the rapid increase of the rates of late years, though a point on which much stress has been laid, is not that which I consider as of the greatest importance; but the cause of this rapid increase, the increasing proportion of the dependent poor, appears to me to be a subject so truly alarming, as in some degree to threaten the extinction of all honourable feeling and spirit among the lower ranks of society, and to degrade and depress the condition of a very large and most important part of the community.}

Under this impression I ventured to propose a plan for the gradual abolition of a system, which it was acknowledged had produced effects very different from those which had

been expected. And I still think that if we weigh on the one hand the great quantity of subjection and dependence which the poor laws create, together with the kind of relief which they afford, against the greater degree of freedom and the higher wages which would be the necessary consequence of their abolition, it will be difficult to believe that the mass of comfort and happiness would not be greater on the latter supposition, although the few that were then in distress would have no other resource than voluntary charity.

But though I think that the difficulties attending this state of things would be more than compensated by its advantages; yet after a compulsory provision for the poor had been so long established in this country, I am aware that these difficulties would be so strongly felt, and indeed I feel them so strongly myself, that I should be very sorry to

see any legislative regulation founded on the plan I have proposed, till the higher and middle classes of society were generally convinced of its necessity, and till the poor themselves could be made to understand that they had purchased their right to a provision by law, by too great and extensive a sacrifice of their liberty and happiness.

I cannot however think that it is either just or wise to dwell particularly on these difficulties, or to characterise as harsh and severe any propositions which may leave them to be provided for, by voluntary charity—by those feelings which Providence seems to have implanted in our breasts for that express purpose, and which cannot but be materially impaired by the substitution of positive laws. It should be recollected that a compulsory provision for the poor is almost peculiar to England, and that there are many parts of the Continent, without such a

provision, and without those pre-eminent advantages of government which Englishmen enjoy, where the condition of the lower classes is superior. That cases of individual distress must occur in these countries, no person can for a moment doubt; but as there is no habitual dependence on a legal provision, the number is comparatively small; and I have never heard of any of those consequences of the absence of Poor Laws, which have sometimes been contemplated by warm imaginations, in the case of their abolition here.

The subject is besides peculiarly complex and delicate. To you who have made it your study, I can confidently appeal for the justice of my application of Mr. Hume's remark on the science of politics², to every plan for im-

² "Of all sciences, there is none where first appearances are more deceitful than in politics." Hume, Essay xi. vol. 1, p. 416. — He is led to this remark when speaking of Foundling Hospitals, which evidently belong to that branch of the science which is at present under discussion.

proving the condition of the lower classes of society. First appearances indeed are in this branch of the science still more deceitful than in any other; and the partial and immediate effects of a particular mode of giving relief are often directly opposite to the general and permanent consequences. This circumstance renders all inquiries of the kind remarkably open to misconstruction; and those who have not had leisure to pay that attention to the subject which its peculiar intricacy demands, if they hear one or two detached passages noticed by their friends which contradict their first feelings and apprehensions, are naturally disposed to be prejudiced against the whole Work in which they are found. If for a moment during your late Speech you gave the sanction of your authority to these prejudices, I am convinced that it was not really your intention to increase them; but that, in legislating on a point in which the interests of so large a part of the community are concerned, it is your great

wish that the legislature should not be prevented by partial and temporary considerations from steadily pursuing that system, which promises best to promote and secure the permanent happiness of the lower classes of society. There are not many laws either human or divine, which in particular instances do not appear harsh and unequal; but if on that account we were to be deprived of the guide of general rules, we should lose at once the best security of order, virtue, and happiness among men.

To those who know me personally, I feel that I have no occasion to defend my character from the imputation of hardness of heart; and to those who do not, I can only express my confidence that when they have attended to the subject as much as I have, they will be convinced that I have not admitted a single proposition which appears to detract from the present comforts and gratifications of the poor, without very strong

grounds for believing that it would be more than compensated to them by the general and permanent improvement of their condition.]

The moral obligation of private, active, and discriminate charity I have endeavoured to enforce in the strongest language of which I was capable; and if I have denied the *natural right* of the poor to support, it is solely, to use the language of Sir F. M. Eden, after his able and laborious Enquiry into the State of the Poor, because "it may be doubted whether any right, " the gratification of which seems to be impracticable, can be said to exist." To those who do not admit this conclusion, the denial of such a right may appear to be unfavourable to the poor. [But those who are convinced of its truth, may, with the most anxious desire of extending the comforts and elevating the condition of the lower classes of society, rationally express their apprehensions, that the attempt to sanction by law

a right which in the nature of things cannot be adequately gratified, may terminate in disappointment, irritation, and aggravated poverty.

With regard to the large sum which is collected from the higher classes of society for the support of the poor, I can safely say, that in the discussion of the question it has always been with me a most subordinate consideration.

I should indeed think that the whole, or a much greater sum, was well applied, if it merely relieved the comparatively few that would be in want, if there were no public provision for them, without the fatal and unavoidable consequence of continually increasing their number, and depressing the condition of those who were struggling to maintain themselves in independence. Were it possible to fix the number of the poor and to avoid the further depression of the independent labourer, I should be the first to

propose that those who were actually in want should be most liberally relieved, and that they should receive it as a right, and not as a bounty.

I ought to apologize for detaining you so long from the immediate subject of this letter; but I am sure your own feelings will tell you, that though I must be prepared to hear unmoved all those accusations of "hardness of heart" which appear to me to be the result of ignorance or malice, yet that any remark of the same kind coming from an enlightened and distinguished member of the British Senate cannot but give me pain, although accompanied by expressions of respect for my understanding.

But to proceed to the point. Putting all idea of the abolition of the Poor Laws out of the question, let us consider the general principles on which they ought to be improved. And here we are quite agreed, that the great object

should be, to elevate as much as possible the general character of the lower classes of the community, and to draw a more marked line between the dependent and independent labourer.

The plan of general education, which you have proposed, is admirably calculated to attain the first object; and should you only be able to accomplish this part of your Bill, you will in my opinion confer a most important benefit on your Country. The regulations which you have suggested in the mode of supporting those who are dependent on the parish, and the distinctions that you would introduce between the idle and the industrious, though not entirely free from objection³, seem on the whole calculated to accomplish

³ I doubt the practicability of making the criminal poor wear marks; though it is certainly true that a man who has brought himself and family on the parish by his own idleness and vices, deserves to be thus distinguished from those who have been only unfortunate. With regard to the honorary badges

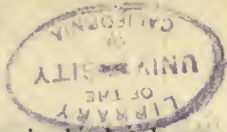
the end which they have in view. But there are other regulations, to the effects of which I look forward with considerable doubt and apprehension.

¶ The principal object of these apprehensions is the operation of the clause which empowers parishes to build cottages, combined with that which determines every kind of property to be rateable. Though these two clauses are unquestionably calculated to produce present comfort and relief; yet I much fear that their ultimate effects may be of a very different nature, and may tend powerfully to counteract the general principles on which your whole system of improvement is founded.

proposed, though they might produce some good effects when distributed by a particular nobleman of high character; yet as a general measure I think they would be inefficient, particularly on account of the chance of their being improperly bestowed.

[The operations of the Poor Laws are so complicated, that it is almost impossible to take in at one view all their different bearings and relations. The establishment of them, one should naturally expect, would produce in any country a larger proportion of births and marriages than was usual *ceteris paribus* in others. But in England it appears that the proportion of births and marriages to the whole population is less than in most of the other countries of Europe; and though this circumstance is principally to be accounted for from other causes, yet it affords decisive evidence that the poor laws do not encourage early marriages *so much* as might naturally be expected.]

The specific cause of this unexpected effect is, I have little doubt, the difficulty of procuring habitations. As the great burden of the poor's rates falls upon the land, it is natural that landlords should be fearful of building cottages except



where the demand for labour is absolutely urgent, and they will often submit, or at least oblige their tenants to submit, to an occasional scarcity of hands, rather than run the risk of fixing on their estates a permanent increase of rates. Under this difficulty of procuring habitations, which I have reason to think is very considerable, and which indeed I stated in the last edition of my work as the principal reason why the Poor Laws had not been so extensive and prejudicial in their effects as might have been expected, the rates have not only increased during late years with unusual rapidity; but (what is the only just criterion) the number of the dependent poor continually bears a greater proportion to the whole population. And it is highly probable that if this difficulty be removed by any of the regulations in your Bill, we shall soon see the proportion increased in a much greater degree than has ever hitherto been experienced.

Such is the tendency to form early connections, that with the encouragement of a sufficient number of tenements, I have very little doubt that the population might be so pushed, and such a quantity of labour in time thrown into the market, as to render the condition of the independent labourer absolutely hopeless, and to make the common wages of day labour insufficient to support a single child without parish assistance.

I am very far from meaning to say that your Bill, as at present constituted, will certainly produce this effect; but I wish you to consider particularly how far it may have this tendency. You will probably alledge that under your Bill both the landlords and the parishes will still have a strong interest not to build fresh tenements unless called for by the increasing demand for labour. But it appears to me that your proposal

for making every kind of productive capital rateable⁴, will effect a most important alteration in this interest.

If the burden of the poor's rates were really divided equally among all sorts of property, I am afraid it might be shown, from incontrovertible principles of political economy, that it would be a pecuniary advantage to all those who employ labour, and who would according to your Bill have the principal influence in all the determinations of Vestries, to push this encouragement to population to a considerable extent; because, in the employment of their capital, they would gain much more by the cheapness of labour, than they would lose by the payment of their rates.

⁴ I should think that very considerable difficulties would occur in rating personal property in the mode proposed by the bill; but I am here arguing upon the supposition of its being effectually executed.

Of this, I think, you will be convinced, if you consider, in the first place, that when the rate of the increase of population depends exclusively on the wages of labour, the unmarried must be paid as high as the married; but that in the application of the poor laws to the encouragement of population, the assistance is only given to those who have families. Upon the latter system therefore a greater supply of labour may be obtained by an equal cost, and an equal supply at a less cost. In the next place, the capitalist would not only on this account employ his money more economically in supplying the market with labour, by means of the rates; but from the mode in which these rates were collected, he would receive a very large subscription towards this supply from persons not directly using the commodity when produced. In both points of view, therefore, it would be advantageous to him considerably to extend the operation of the Poor Laws.

It has been observed by Dr. Adam Smith, that no effects of the legislature had been able to raise the salary of curates to that price which seemed necessary for their decent maintenance; and the reason which he justly assigns is, that the bounties held out to the profession by the scholarships and fellowships of the universities always occasioned a redundant supply. In the same manner if a more than usual supply of labour were encouraged by the premiums of small tenements, nothing could prevent a great and general fall in its price.

The evil would indeed ultimately check itself, as most evils do; but if we advert to the manner in which this would be done, the state to which the country must be previously reduced will not appear to be an enviable one. I apprehend that the increase would continue, till from the failure in the supply of tenements, and the diminished demand for labour, the situ-

ation of the poor supported by parishes became so uncomfortable as to deter the rising generation from marrying, with a certainty of being reduced to the same state. And if before this relaxation in the rate of increase had taken place, one third, or one half of the entire population were dependent on the parish, which would be by no means impossible, the picture of the state of society could not but be considered as a 'disgrace' to the British constitution.

It might be imagined that the diminished demand for labour would check the increase of the labouring poor long before it had arrived at the point here supposed; but it should be recollected, that the demand for labour would extend with its reduced price, and the same quantity of capital would be able to employ a greater number of hands; at least if no difficulties were to occur in our importations of foreign corn. If the poor would continue to

receive the bounties of the rich, I apprehend that it would be possible to reduce the wages of labour to what was sufficient for the support of a single man.

I am perfectly convinced that there is scarcely any man in the kingdom who would more strongly deprecate the consequences that I have described than yourself; but you have made no provision to obviate them:

You have stated in your Bill that the parish poor in many places are very ill accommodated with habitations, and I have no doubt of the fact; but if I rightly comprehend the laws which regulate the progress of population, whatever accommodations you may make for them at present, the difficulty will shortly recur, and the only question is, whether it is better for the permanent happiness of the poor that this difficulty should exist when one eighth, or one

seventh of the population is dependent, than when one third or one half has been reduced to the same undesirable state. I would never wish, as I have before repeatedly stated, to push general principles too far, though I think they should always be kept in view. If our poor laws continue, our accommodations for the poor must be made to keep pace with the progress of population; but as we find even under the present difficulties with regard to habitations, that the proportion of the dependent poor to the whole mass has been increasing; we may reasonably conclude that the powers which parishes at present possess for this purpose, are generally speaking sufficient; and we should hesitate before we introduce so great an alteration as to make it the interest of landlords and parishes, to encourage rather than repress the increase of the dependent poor.

There is one very just apprehension with regard to the effect of the parish cottages, which

you have yourself expressed; but the cause of it is not sufficiently removed by your Bill. You recommend that these tenements should be let at the highest rents that are offered, in order that the property of those landlords who have cottages on their estates may not be materially injured by an unfair competition. But as the parishes must have a discretionary power in letting their cottages, and are indeed expressly permitted, if they see reason, to allow of their being inhabited without rent; it does not appear to me that it will be possible to keep up the rents of these cottages to their necessary, or, as Dr. Smith calls it, their natural rates; and the landholders being thus completely discouraged from building fresh cottages, or perhaps even from repairing their old ones; we should in time see the greater part of our villages consisting of parish tenements, as well as the greater part of our labouring classes dependent on parish relief.

I need not, I am sure, insist that such a state of things, were it to take place, would completely counteract the spirit and intention of all the regulations which you have proposed. A state of dependence so general would depress the character of the common people of this country more than any system of education could elevate it; and both the power and the will to save and acquire property, would be so far diminished, that very few, I conceive, would either be disposed, or be able to make use, of your benevolent institution of the Poor's Fund, or even to become members of Friendly Societies.

I am fully aware that the poor's rates, as they are at present distributed, press most unequally on a particular class of the community; and I should think it a point of no considerable importance in the actual state of the country, to relieve the land from bearing almost exclusively

the burden of a tax, which, as it falls not only on the net rents of the landlord but in part on the capital employed in agriculture, must necessarily impede the progress of cultivation. But till some effectual and satisfactory provision can be made against the danger that I have pointed out, I should greatly fear, that in endeavouring to avoid one evil, we might fall into another far more fatal and extensive in its consequences.

Could such a provision indeed be made, the principal objection to the Poor Laws would be done away. If we could be secure, that, though the number of the dependent poor might increase with the increasing population, yet that their *proportion* to it would remain the same; and if this proportion were not so great as very materially to affect the whole body, the question would at once assume a different form. It would still be true however that the Poor Laws even in such a state

would have a tendency to depress the independent labourer, to weaken in some degree the springs of industry and good conduct, and to put virtue and vice more on a level than they would be in the natural course of things; but as in all human institutions it is impossible to avoid some disadvantages, it might fairly be urged that the certain relief of the aged and the helpless, of those who had met with misfortunes which no common prudence could have avoided, and of those who had a greater number of children than they could be expected to foresee, would more than counterbalance those inconveniencies, and that the good would preponderate over the evil. [I had certainly much rather that the poor were deterred from very early and improvident marriages by the fear of dependent poverty than by the contemplation of positive distress; but this concession implies that dependent poverty is so undesirable, that if it involved a large portion of the society, the evil would entirely overwhelm the good.]

To make the advantages of a system of Poor Laws counterbalance its disadvantages, it seems to be necessary that they should be so confined in their operation, as not to depress the wages of labour below what is sufficient for the support of the *average* number of children that might be expected from each marriage. If they extended no further than this, every man in marrying might have a fair and rational hope, that by industry and good conduct, he might be able to continue independent; and if this hope failed merely through the largeness of his family, he would not be much degraded either in his own eyes or those of his fellow labourers; but should this hope be once entirely removed, should this stimulus to industry and prudence be done away, and a large proportion of births and marriages be really produced by the extension of the system (as it is physically impossible for the natural and acquired resources of any country long to support an unrestricted

population), we should soon see a most unfavourable change take place in the present small mortality, which we justly consider as one of the great tests of our national happiness; and a large proportion of deaths would invariably accompany the large proportion of births. The births however might still exceed the deaths, the population might still be increasing, but the character of it would be greatly changed; it would consist of a much larger proportion of persons not capable of adding by their exertions to the resources of the state; each generation would pass away in a more rapid succession; and the greatness of the mortality would sufficiently indicate the misery of the state of the society.

I am really unable to suggest any provision which would effectually secure us against an approach to the evils here contemplated, and not be open to the objection of violating our promises to the poor. Certainly no such provision is to be found in the clauses or probable

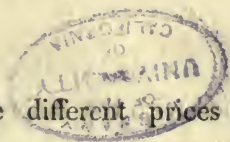
operation of your Bill. It is your object, and I trust that of the nation, to diminish the proportion of dependent poverty, and not to increase it; but the specific evil which I fear from your bill, as it stands at present, is an increase of it.

I should most earnestly recommend, that, at all events, one or other of the two Clauses which I have particularly noticed should be given up. If parishes be empowered to build cottages, the rates should continue on the land as the only adequate check to their increase. Or if all capital be made rateable, no new power of building tenements should be given to parishes, but every thing be left as before to individual interest and exertion.

It would certainly be most desirable to improve the cottages of the poor throughout the kingdom; and no mode of active beneficence could be pointed out to the proprietors of land,

in which they could confer so essential a benefit on the labouring poor and on the country in general, as by paying particular attention to the neatness, convenience, and substantial repairs of all the cottages on their estates. But any general plan for building cottages at the public expence, unless confined to the accommodation of a particular class of persons, or in some other way most strictly limited, is so liable to abuse, that I should be greatly afraid of seeing it attempted.

The clause which allows parishes to obtain assistance from the county stock when their rates amount to double the general average, appears to me objectionable on the same grounds, as the two Clauses just noticed. Though it might sometimes afford a relief much wanted, yet, as it would tend on the whole to make parishes more indifferent about the increase of their dependent poor, I should fear that it would produce more harm than good.



It would appear from the different prices of labour in different parishes, and the different proportions of population relieved, that the farmers, although they bear themselves a large portion of the assessments, have already learned in some places to prefer low wages and high rates, to low rates and high wages⁵. The consequences of this preference I am inclined to believe would have been more marked than they really are, if the demand for men, on account of the war, had not rendered it extremely difficult to keep down the price of labour. But as it is, this circumstance, com-

⁵ Mr. Rose, in a note to his "Observations on the Poor Laws," p. 14, says "There is but too much reason to believe that in many parts of England the cultivators of the land are more solicitous to restrain the price of labour than to keep down the poor's rate; in which case the latter in fact becomes a part of the former. In Sussex, an agricultural country, the parishioners relieved are 23 in 100 on the population, and the rates average 1*l.* 5*s.* 11½*d.* on it; in Surrey 13 in 100, and 13*s.* 3½*d.*; in Kent 14 in 100, and 16*s.* 7½*d.*; and in Hants 15 in 100, and 16*s.* 3*d.*"

bined with the different proportions of the rack rentals on which the rates are levied, occasions so great a difference in the nominal poundage, that counties would have frequent applications from parishes that had no just claims; and it may be doubted whether the discretionary power vested in the justices would be a sufficient check to them.

I shall not detain you long on the other parts of the Bill.

You already know how ardently I wish you success in your plan of extending the benefits of education to the poor. There are at this time, I believe, few countries in Europe in which the peasantry are so ignorant as in England and Ireland; and if you are instrumental in removing this reproach, you will have just reason to be proud of your exertions. Our formidable neighbour certainly does not

think that education is likely to impede his subjects either in fighting or working; and the conduct of the conscripts, a large portion of whom is taken from a superior class of society to that which forms the mass of modern armies, clearly justifies his opinion. The principal objections which I have ever heard advanced against the education of the poor would be removed if it became general. A man who can read and write now may be discontented with his condition, and wish to rise above it; but if all his fellow-labourers possessed the same advantage, his relative situation in society would remain the same as before, and the only effect would be that the condition of the whole mass would be elevated and improved!

In the fear that any great expences in the first erection of schools should indispose the country gentlemen to the whole system, I should recommend all practicable economy in

providing proper rooms; and if each child paid a fixed sum (of course very low, and discharged by the rates in the case of orphans and parish poor), the schoolmaster would then have a stronger interest to increase the number of his pupils; and the objectionable clause might be removed, which gives a discretionary power to the parish of determining the sum to be paid, with reference to the ability of the parents. To give respectability to the schools, it would be very desirable that those who are a little above the class of labourers, should send their children to them, which they would never do, if they paid in proportion to their superior means. The due exercise of such a discretionary power would, besides, be extremely difficult; and it could hardly be expected to take place, without often producing just cause of offence.

Respecting the clause which relates to the

Poor's Fund, I see the force of your objections to country establishments, though it must be acknowledged that their vicinity to the poor man would be a very convenient and encouraging circumstance to him. It is most certainly true, as you have stated, that a secure place, in which the savings of industry might be deposited advantageously, is a want very generally felt by the poor, particularly by sergants; and if this want cannot be removed in the way that they would like best, it is earnestly to be hoped, that an establishment in London, though less attractive at first, will after a time gain their full confidence.

All persons will, I conceive, agree with you in the propriety of exempting from the rates cottages, the rents of which are under five pounds. The situation of the persons inhabiting such houses is peculiarly hard. They are at present not only paying a sum for the relief of others which they can ill spare from

their own necessities; but they are really subscribing towards a competition against their own earnings. They are making themselves poorer, not only by the amount of what they pay in rates, but by the amount of the reduction which the application of those rates occasions in the general wages of labour. They seem therefore to have the strongest possible claim to the exemption proposed.

The other clauses of your bill appear to me, on the whole, calculated to improve our system of poor laws; but I have not leisure at present to enter into those details which the proper consideration of them would require; nor am I qualified justly to appreciate the difficulties with which the execution of them may be attended.

The principal object of the present letter is to point out to your attention one particular danger, of which you do not seem to be suf-

ficiently aware, and against the approaches of which your Bill certainly does not provide. I am confident that, if I have succeeded in making you see the objection in the same light that I do, you will be the first to exert your abilities to remove it. That in your generous efforts to raise and improve the condition of the poor, you may meet with the fullest success is my most ardent wish. Believe me,

Sir,

With the most sincere respect,

Your most obedient humble servant,

T. ROBT. MALTHUS.

P. S. I have just met with a work entitled "A Short Inquiry into the Policy, Humanity, and past Effects of the Poor Laws," which among other important matter contains the proposal of a plan for regulating the extent of their operation in future. As it requires the continuance of those

inquiries into property which are considered as being so objectionable in the Income Tax, I should suppose it is not likely to be consented to; but in other respects it is less objectionable than any I have yet seen, and is certainly well worthy of your attention. I have not yet had time to read through the whole work, but from the cursory view of it I have taken, it seems to shew not only great practical knowledge, but no ordinary acquaintance with general principles. At the same time it must be observed that the opinions of the author lead directly to that species of danger to which I have endeavoured to draw your attention in this Letter; and if they were to be adopted, unaccompanied by the proposed check, I should expect from them the very worst consequences to the happiness of the lower classes of society.

Although the author in general seems clearly to understand the principle of population, yet he is not sufficiently impressed with this truth; that, even putting the consideration of dependence out of the question, it is a physical impossibility to place those who are relieved by parishes permanently in a desirable state; that is, in such a state as for a young man to feel no objection to enter into it the moment that he has an inclination to marry.

Hertford,
27th March, 1807.

T H E E N D.

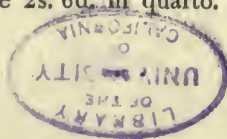
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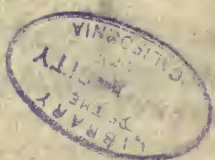


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